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Chairman: Mrs. Sandru (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Romania)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.35 a.m.

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(b) Human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms (*continued*) (A/53/72–S/1998/156, A/53/81–S/1998/225, A/53/82–S/1998/229, A/53/83–S/1998/230, A/53/86–S/1998/240, A/53/89–S/1998/250, A/53/93–S/1998/291, A/53/95–S/1998/311, A/53/98–S/1998/335, A/53/113–S/1998/345, A/53/115–S/1998/365, A/53/268, A/53/279, A/53/284, A/53/293 and Add.1, A/53/304, A/53/309, A/53/313, A/53/324, A/53/337, A/53/400, A/53/501, A/C.3/53/6, A/C.3/53/L.5)

(c) Human rights situations and reports of special rapporteurs and representatives (*continued*) (A/53/84–S/1998/234, A/53/114, A/53/120, A/53/182–S/1998/669, A/53/188, A/53/322 and Add.1, A/53/355, A/53/364, A/53/365, A/53/366, A/53/367, A/53/402, A/53/423 and Corr.1, A/53/433, A/53/490, A/53/504, A/53/530, A/53/537, A/53/539, A/53/563, A/C.3/53/3, A/C.3/53/8)

(e) Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (*continued*) (A/53/36, Suppl. No. 36)

1. **Mrs. Nguyen Thi Nha** (Viet Nam), noting that human rights issues were being discussed during the present session in the context of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the fifth anniversary of the adoption by the World Conference on Human Rights of the Vienna Declaration and Plan of Action, said the review process should help to orient new activities towards cooperation rather than confrontation, and towards genuine concern rather than polemics.

2. All human rights being universal, indivisible and interdependent, equal attention should be given to their implementation, promotion and protection. In recognition of the value of cultural diversity which characterized all human societies, any selective interpretation or application of human rights would only undermine the security of those still being victimized by age-old hatreds.

3. Since there was no intrinsic contradiction between the rights of the individual and those of the community, there should be no artificial distinction drawn between them. Human rights should not be considered apart from their national and regional historical, cultural and religious context.

4. The right to development was an especially important human right and Viet Nam therefore welcomed the adoption of Assembly resolution 52/136 and Commission on Human Rights resolution 1998/72 relating to that right, as well as efforts aimed at its codification in international law. While the eradication of poverty and the promotion of development were primarily the responsibility of States, the United Nations system should also work towards those goals.

5. Since the Assembly was to consider for adoption at its current session the draft declaration on the right and responsibility of individuals, groups and organs of society to promote and protect universally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms, her Government wished to stress that it was the primary responsibility and duty of the State to enable individuals to enjoy their basic rights and freedoms. Moreover, none of the rights or freedoms referred to in the Declaration should impair or be contrary to the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenants on Human Rights and other international applicable instruments and nothing in the Declaration should impede the proper functioning of domestic law consistent with the Charter of the United Nations and other international obligations in the field of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

6. As a member of the Non-Aligned Movement, Viet Nam believed that the human rights issue must be addressed with objectivity, respect for national sovereignty and territorial integrity, impartiality and transparency, taking into account the characteristics of each country. The agreed conclusions recently adopted by the Economic and Social Council concerning the coordinated follow-up and implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Plan of Action could serve as guidelines. Viet Nam was committed to defending the basic rights and freedoms of its people, but also hoped to cooperate on the international level, particularly with the United Nations system. During his

recent visit to Viet Nam, the Special Rapporteur on the elimination of all forms of religious intolerance had received confirmation that Viet Nam was above all committed to national unity and nation-building and that it respected freedom of religion and belief.

7. **Mr. Cordeiro** (Brazil) commended the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for its integrated approach to human rights, as the strengthening of those rights went hand in hand with improvement in a country's economic and social situation.

8. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the two International Covenants adopted in 1966 and the series of instruments adopted in the 1970s represented standards whose implementation must be monitored. The relevant monitoring mechanisms had an important role to play, and Brazil was heartened by the special procedures established by the Commission on Human Rights, the work of the Special Representatives and Rapporteurs and the monitoring activities of the treaty bodies, as well as the Commission's decision to undertake a comprehensive review of the human rights mechanisms. Streamlining and consolidating in a single report the information provided by Member States concerning implementation of the various instrument would allow for a more effective use of resources at both the national and international level and would also facilitate the work of the monitoring organs.

9. Some countries were refusing any dialogue with the international monitoring mechanisms on the grounds that those mechanisms jeopardized international cooperation for the promotion of human rights. However, there was no such contradiction; monitoring was a vital element of cooperation and helped to identify the underlying causes of human rights violations, to formulate recommendations and thus promote rights. However, monitoring must be strictly based on humanitarian grounds and the principles of international cooperation, and not on purely political considerations.

10. The United Nations system must base its activities on the universality and interdependence of human rights and must be guided by the principle of solidarity and respect for cultural values.

11. Developing countries had undertaken a process of democratization, economic stabilization, growth and improved living conditions for the poor. At the international level, it was now important to promote democracy, development and respect for human rights, and the efforts undertaken within the United Nations system in that regard were praiseworthy. Since the level of resources available for technical cooperation in the field of human rights was not, however, commensurate with the needs of the developing countries, their capacity must be strengthened. The draft resolution on the strengthening of the rule of law to be introduced by Brazil with some 90 original sponsors, was aimed precisely at strengthening those capacities.

12. **Mr. Al-Sudairy** (Saudi Arabia) said that in Saudi Arabia respect for human rights, which was considered a divine precept, was deeply entrenched in daily life; there was no racial discrimination and no religious discrimination. In fact, the Government, which espoused the noble cause defended by the United Nations bodies working in favour of the promotion and protection of human rights, was determined to strengthen its cooperation with those bodies and would therefore continue to provide them with voluntary contributions. Saudi Arabia had become a party to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. It had also set up as special committee to study other instruments with a view to accession.

13. At the national level, human rights were already part of the school curriculum, social programmes and the media. The fundamental law adopted by Saudi Arabia guaranteed the rights of its citizens and of others residing there because they were based on the universality of human rights. Thanks to that law, Saudi Arabia was one of the most stable, secure and prosperous countries in the world. The standard of living was very high, employment opportunities were open to all and education at all levels was free, as was health care. Charitable organizations, assisted by the Government, cared for the needy so that they too could contribute to the development of the country. The Government had also sought the help of millions of foreign workers, who also contributed to the development of the country. In addition to enjoying the same privileges as Saudi Arabian citizens, such as exemption from taxes, they had the right to transfer their savings to their own countries and to participate thereby in their economic development and in reducing unemployment there.

14. His delegation welcomed the progress in promoting and protecting human rights since the 1993 Vienna World Conference on Human Rights. The task now was to expand the consensus and avoid a bilateral and selective approach in human rights matters. Saudi Arabia looked forward to a realistic approach to the issue which, while protecting human rights, would take account of each society's special features. He reaffirmed Saudi Arabia's commitment to tolerance and noted with satisfaction that the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the elimination of all forms of religious intolerance had thanked the Saudi Arabian authorities, in paragraph 48 of his report at the previous

session (A/52/477), for their cooperation in the human rights area.

15. **Mr. Rastam** (Malaysia) said that 1998 was a particularly important year because it marked the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the five-year review of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. Over those 50 years, major advances had been made in the promotion and protection of human rights, demonstrated by the adoption of over 70 legal instruments on human rights, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, which reaffirmed the link between human rights, democracy and development.

16. Nevertheless, some serious problems remained unsolved, including poverty, which affected more than one in five of the world's population and had been exacerbated by globalization and also by conflict situations, which sometimes led to genocide or ethnic cleansing.

17. Thus, there were still challenges to be met, particularly in the political field, where a number of misconceptions needed to be set right. Firstly, many countries were taking human rights to be a means of exerting pressure to achieve specific political ends, thereby increasing the level of suspicion concerning human rights issues and jeopardizing what progress had been made up to that point. Secondly, some countries had a selective perception of human rights and would pick and choose only those aspects that interested them, particularly civil and political rights to the detriment of economic, social and cultural rights. Malaysia believed that cooperation instead of confrontation was the only way to promote and protect human rights.

18. Also, some countries did not have the necessary structures and resources to ensure real promotion of human rights. The international community should therefore provide them with assistance through the technical cooperation programme.

19. Further, there was a gross imbalance in the way civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights were treated. Thus, whereas the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights counted about the same number of States parties, the Human Rights Committee had been allocated $1,356,100 for the period 1996–1997 while the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights had received only $563,000. That state of affairs should be put right as quickly as possible.

20. Many countries, particularly developing countries, had not been able to make progress in human rights, since they had not been able to make progress in development. Malaysia welcomed the decision to establish an open-ended working group to monitor and review progress in the promotion and implementation of the right to development; the decision to appoint an independent expert to report to the working group on the current state of progress in the implementation of the right to development; and the consensus resolution of the Commission on Human Rights on the right to development. His delegation nevertheless regretted that in the interests of that consensus some very important parts of the text had been sacrificed.

21. Whereas the Declaration on the Right to Development made it clear that primary responsibility for creating favourable conditions for implementing the right to development lay with States, the markets, which were controlled by the rich countries, did not recognize the needs and aspirations of millions of poor people in the developing countries. The international community should therefore mobilize to eliminate the obstacles to implementing the right to development. To do so, it should step up the dialogue on restructuring the international financial architecture. Official development assistance, another important component, had fallen for five consecutive years, a trend which the developed countries should strive to reverse.

22. The appointment of the High Commissioner for Human Rights was commendable, as was the work the High Commissioner had done through dialogue with Member States. Another important decision taken at Vienna had yet to be implemented through the continuing adaptation of the United Nations human rights machinery to current and future needs in the promotion and protection of human rights.

23. At a time when ways and means were being studied to better coordinate and strengthen the special procedures system, Malaysia, although it recognized the importance of preserving the system's independence and impartiality, stressed that the human rights mechanisms needed to be adjusted and rationalized, that their effectiveness must be increased in order to improve their credibility and that their objectives must be made clear. The special procedures should also reflect the majority will of the international community to pay more attention to economic, social and cultural rights. Also, to establish a solid basis for the years ahead, the existing problems should be subjected to methodical study and treatment.

24. **Mr. Lavrov** (Russian Federation), recalling that development, international stability and democracy were interdependent and conditional on respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, said that international cooperation in that area should prevail over polemics.

Currently, the emergence of a culture of peace was impeded by conflicts, humanitarian crises, corruption, terrorism, drug addiction and poverty. There was therefore a need to strengthen international cooperation in the field of human rights by drawing on regional experiences and supporting the measures and initiatives undertaken in that spirit, notably in Asia, the Pacific, Africa and Latin America. In that regard, he commended the efforts of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and her cooperation with OSCE. In that connection, the development of closer cooperation between the United Nations and the Council for Europe would be desirable. Referring to the report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (A/53/36), which stated that abandoning social justice to the blind forces of competition and globalization was also to abandon a fundamental responsibility of society and the State which, in turn, undermined the latter's claim to legitimacy, he said that his delegation accorded special importance to social issues, since it believed that equal opportunities and acknowledgement of the needs of the population could not only stabilize development at the national level, but also reduce the negative effects of globalization on society. Human rights was also playing a growing role in peacekeeping activities. In that context, it was vital that measures adopted in the interests of peace and security should facilitate, rather than impede, the enjoyment of human rights. Indeed, the various human-rights-treaty bodies had recommended that sanctions regimes should provide for measures aimed at protecting the basic rights of the most vulnerable groups. His delegation noted with satisfaction that the number of human rights field staff was higher than ever before. In order to enhance the effectiveness of their work, those operations should be evaluated and the strengths and weaknesses identified.

25. Once again, the attention of the international community was focused on the Balkans. His delegation was convinced that, in Kosovo, reason must prevail over force. The only means of ensuring that the repercussions of the conflict did not affect the rest of the Balkans and Europe as a whole was to find a negotiated solution to the conflict which granted a large measure of autonomy to Kosovo without infringing the territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The provisions of Security Council resolutions 1160 and 1199 (1998) were clearly directed at the Albanian leaders in Kosovo, who must take the measures necessary to halt acts of terrorism and refrain from any separatist activity. States, notwithstanding their legitimate concern at the humanitarian crisis in Kosovo, must not impose selective and unilateral coercive measures against either party.

26. The population living in the regions controlled by the Taliban continued to suffer the consequences of the civil war in Afghanistan. The United Nations had a leading role to play in finding a political solution to that crisis. In Africa, the situation in the Great Lakes region remained particularly unstable, despite the efforts of the international community. One of the main obstacles to be overcome, if the bloodshed was to be stopped and respect for human rights in the region re-established, was the problem of impunity with respect to past crimes. By contrast, the situation of human rights in Iran seemed promising: a broad dialogue had been opened in the social and political fields, an Islamic Commission on Human Rights had been established and reform of the legal system had begun.

27. Time and again his delegation had drawn the attention of the organs of the United Nations to the situation of their compatriots in Estonia and Latvia. It was vital that the international and regional authorities concerned should take the necessary measures in that regard. His delegation welcomed the results of the referendum held on 3 October 1998 in Latvia by which the population had approved the proposed amendments to the law on citizenship, demonstrating thereby its commitment to promoting the country's long-term interests and harmony between the various communities which constituted Latvian society, and ensuring respect for human rights in accordance with the universally recognized norms of international law. However, the documents adopted subsequently by the Latvian Parliament still ignored the principles of international law governing relations between the State and national minorities, particularly in the fields of education and the right to information. Furthermore, the Declaration on legionnaires was an insult to the memory of the victims of Fascism. Although the enormity of the crimes committed by the Latvian SS during the Second World War was well known, there were some who wished to turn them into national heroes. It was to be hoped that the Latvian Government and Parliament would not yield to the forces of nationalism and would strive to establish in Latvia a climate of tolerance within a multi-ethnic society, and that OSCE and other international organizations, together with non-governmental organizations, would contribute to the success of that undertaking. It must be noted that other countries among the neighbours of the Russian Federation had also decided to reduce the role of the Russian language in the media and education, to limit the right of minorities to instruction in their language and to prohibit the activities of certain community organizations. Citing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which stated that recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights

of all members of the human family was the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world, he said that those principles must now be put into practice.

28. **Ms. Rasi** (Finland), speaking on agenda items 110 (b) and (e), emphasized the importance of the rights of minorities, an issue which deserved greater attention in the human rights context, since persons belonging to ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities were at greater risk of human rights violations. Guarantees for the rights of national minorities were a stabilizing factor in intra-State and inter-State relations. Ethnic intolerance often engendered violent conflict, suffering and waves of refugees. It was therefore crucial to promote pluralism and tolerance in multicultural societies.

29. Europe had not been spared by racism and xenophobia. The Roma community, for example, faced discrimination in the workplace, and in relation to housing and education. The issue of national minorities was dealt with both by the Council of Europe and by OSCE, which had developed protection norms. In addition, two important instruments had entered into force namely, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, which incorporated certain norms adopted by OSCE as well as the provisions of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Finland had ratified both instruments and noted with satisfaction that the Council of Europe was drafting an additional protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights, widening the scope of the provisions of article 14 on non-discrimination.

30. Practical and standard-setting activities would also have to be strengthened within the United Nations system, since all human rights instruments contained provisions on non-discrimination, which must be fully implemented. Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights was a cornerstone of minority rights. The Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, while not legally binding, also played a significant role. Finland fully supported the efforts of the Working Group on Minorities of the Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, and welcomed the fact that it had been granted permanent status.

31. She would like the promotion and protection of the rights of minorities to be strengthened and Governments to take special measures to that end. However, minorities must themselves respect democratic principles and the rights of the persons belonging to the group, particularly women and girls, the ultimate goal being the full realization of the human rights of each individual.

32. The right of minority women to education was particularly important since those women played a vital role in maintaining and handing down the cultural values and traditions of the group. Also, effective participation in decision-making by all persons belonging to minority groups was vital.

33. **Ms. Hadar** (Israel), speaking on agenda items 110 (b) and (d), said that the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, established in the aftermath of the Second World War and the Holocaust, were the very principles which had provided the foundation for the establishment of the State of Israel.

34. Israel's Declaration of Independence in 1948 specifically upheld the principles of development based on freedom, justice and peace, complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex and the safeguarding of the holy places of all religions.

35. Before the adoption of a formal constitution, those rights were codified as part of the basic legal system and were guaranteed by the Supreme Court, which had taken a number of initiatives from the beginning to promote the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Supreme Court, also sitting as the High Court of Justice, hears complaints on issues affecting Israel's particular situation. For example, it hears petitions brought before it by Palestinians concerning acts committed by the Israeli authorities in the territories under Israeli administration, stressing Israel's concern for human rights, including those of Palestinians. That situation was without precedent in any military administration.

36. Since the adoption of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, Israel had taken important steps towards strengthening the rule of law and respect for human rights. It had promoted those objectives in the Government, non-governmental organizations and the academic world, working hard to raise public awareness about the rights of the child, the disabled and older persons.

37. In that context, the human rights triumph achieved in the past five years was certainly not negligible: the signing of the peace accords between Israel and the Palestinians in 1993, followed by a series of implementation agreements of which the Wye Memorandum was the most recent example, as well as peace treaties with Jordan and Egypt, bringing peace and prosperity to all the peoples involved.

38. Peace was the gateway to human rights since it guaranteed the right to life. It also provided the impetus for regional cooperation arrangements such as the Barcelona process of cooperation of the Mediterranean countries.

39. After 50 years of independence, however, Israel still faced the threat of war and was exposed to terrorist attacks. Since the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements was signed in 1993, some 251 Israelis had been killed and nearly 1,600 had been injured in terrorist attacks. Israel was therefore forced to continue to take security measures to protect the lives and security of its people.

40. In that connection, her delegation was dismayed by the remarks of the representative of Lebanon, who seemed to take every opportunity, no matter how remote the issue at hand, to attack Israel and to connect human rights with the measures that Israel was obliged to take in response to terrorist attacks and bombardments launched from within Lebanese territory. Israel reiterated its readiness to implement resolution 425 (1978) and bring about peace and respect for human rights on both sides of the border.

41. Although Israel had to take steps in self-defence, it continued to recognize the validity of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and strove to enforce it in the executive, judicial and legislative branches of its government in cooperation with non-governmental organizations.

42. **Ms. Hammam** (World Food Programme (WFP)), speaking on agenda item 110 (b), said that while the link between poverty and hunger was widely recognized, the relationship itself was often misunderstood. Hunger was both the result and the cause of poverty, in that it impeded the economic and social development of the poor. The nutritional deficiencies of mothers and their children could be detrimental to the development of the physical and mental capacities of an entire generation, jeopardizing individual potential. As noted both at the World Food Summit and at the fifty-fourth session of the Commission on Human Rights, the problems of hunger and food insecurity had global dimensions and were likely to persist and even increase dramatically in some regions, unless urgent and concerted action was taken. All of WFP's operations aimed at eradicating hunger and poverty. Its projects sought to help the poor and vulnerable to improve their standard of living by providing them with food and work, to bolster education and health services and to encourage economic development.

43. As the United Nations commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it was generally acknowledged that human rights were indivisible and interdependent, as reaffirmed by the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. In that context, access to adequate levels of nutrition was a prerequisite for the exercise of the right to development and to the enjoyment of human rights in general. WFP supported the mainstreaming of human rights in all development and humanitarian activities and had actively sought, together with its United Nations Development Group (UNDG) partners, to include human rights and the right to development in the provisional guidelines of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF).

44. WFP strove to empower people living in poverty to participate in the decision-making processes that affected them and invited those benefitting from its programmes, especially women, to become involved in the design, planning, implementation, monitoring and management of food aid operations. Given that hunger and poverty affected women and children disproportionately, WFP saw women as critical to providing solutions for food insecurity. Accordingly, it had translated into specific action plans the commitments it made at the Beijing Conference to mainstream gender focus and promote equal rights, particularly equal access of women to resources, employment, markets and trade.

45. Recognizing that no single agency or programme had either the resources or capacity to deal with the many dimensions of hunger and poverty, WFP attached great importance to effective cooperation with national partners, donors, inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations and international financial institutions, in support of hunger and poverty eradication strategies.

46. **Ms. Trone** (United Nations Population Fund), speaking on item 110 (d), said that UNFPA welcomed document A/53/372 and the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (A/53/36), which emphasized gender equality, the human rights of women and the right of every woman to have access to reproductive health services.

47. UNFPA was fully involved in the United Nations system-wide initiatives to strengthen the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action. For example, it had taken an active part in the 1998 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council and in the work of the subgroup on human rights of the United Nations Development Group. It worked closely with human rights treaty bodies, particularly the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. As the chair of the ACC Task Force on Basic Social Services for All, UNFPA had stressed the linkage between human rights and access to basic social services. It would also continue to cooperate

with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights within the context of the memorandum of understanding which the two bodies had signed in July 1998.

48. In all its policies and programming, UNFPA followed the principle that all human rights were universal, indivisible and interdependent. In accordance with its mandate, it focused on the reproductive rights of women and men, gender equality, gender equity and the empowerment of women. In working with countries, it emphasized the need to meet the needs of individuals rather than focusing on demographic targets alone. Its programmes sought to enhance national capacities for the promotion of human rights by supporting the work of Governments and civil society, particularly non-governmental organizations. In several countries, the assistance provided by UNFPA was designed to strengthen legal systems to ensure better protection of human rights and increase women's knowledge of their rights before the law, particularly their civil and political rights and their reproductive rights. Many of the activities of UNFPA aimed to eliminate gender-based violence and train the judiciary and law enforcement personnel. In a number of countries, UNFPA had also sponsored advocacy efforts and symposia for the elimination of female genital mutilation; it had issued a joint statement on the subject, with WHO and UNICEF, and, during the March 1998 session of the Commission on the Status of Women, it had co-sponsored a workshop on the issue. Various workshops and round tables on reproductive health rights and a technical symposium on international migration and development which had called special attention to female migrant workers had been held in the context of the five-year review of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. Regional consultations and country inquiries had confirmed that the Programme of Action was being implemented in a human rights framework and that gender concerns were being integrated into country policies and programmes.

49. **Ms. Vargas** (Costa Rica), speaking on item 110 (b), said that tolerance and pluralism were indispensable to the promotion and protection of human rights. However, tolerance should not be confined to the religious sphere, but should be an integral part of all human relations. Solidarity must prevail over intolerance so as to ensure peace among the peoples and create a better world.

50. In Costa Rica, religious freedom was enshrined in the Constitution and no one could be persecuted for his or her religious beliefs. Costa Rica was a constitutional democracy which believed that peace was based on social justice, the implementation of health, housing and educational programmes, and the promotion of investment in order to ensure economic growth and thus create employment. Although it had not experienced war, Costa Rica had been hit by natural disasters, most recently hurricane Mitch. Because of the tragic consequences of the hurricane, particularly the destruction of entire villages, the many families left homeless, the loss of harvests and the destruction of bridges and roads, the national budget would be devoted to efforts to overcome that emergency situation. While it was not possible to predict or avert natural disasters, it was possible to prevent death and destruction caused by war, intolerance and discrimination.

51. **Ms. Coelho Da Cruz** (Angola), speaking on items 100 (b) and (c), said that the degradation of human rights caused by the precarious social and economic conditions of populations was the source of most internal conflicts at the current time.

52. Her Government, which, because of the deterioration of the internal situation, had been compelled to postpone the holding of the OAU ministerial conference on human rights and people's rights in Africa, was pleased to announce that the conference would be held in Luanda at the end of 1998. Angola was complying with the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Optional Protocol, as was demonstrated by the latest report which her Government had submitted to the Commission on Human Rights. In addition, Angola had recently set up a national human rights commission consisting of representatives from all sectors of civil society.

53. The allegation in paragraph 41 of the report of the Special Rapporteur on the elimination of all forms of intolerance and of discrimination based on religion or belief (A/53/279) that the Angolan armed forces had massacred 21 Christians was totally false and baseless. Her Government had never received any complaint on the subject from any religious institution, whether in Angola or abroad, and no substantive evidence had been submitted as to the identity of the victims, the area in which the incident was alleged to have occurred, or the name of the congregation concerned.

54. Her delegation found it regrettable that the report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (A/53/365) did not faithfully portray the facts on the ground, which could not be considered in a simplistic manner because the conflict itself was multifaceted. The aggression perpetrated against the Democratic Republic of the Congo by Rwanda and Uganda was a serious threat to the integrity and sovereignty of that country and was likely to destabilize the central and southern part of the continent, particularly because of the

exodus of civilians who, fleeing from the armed forces, were taking refuge in neighbouring countries.

55. Following the decision taken by the defence and security organ of the Southern African Development Community, endorsed at the summit meeting held in Mauritius and by the OAU mechanism for conflict prevention and resolution, Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe had offered military assistance to the Democratic Republic of the Congo at its request, in full conformity with Article 51 (Chapter VII) of the Charter of the United Nations and with the specific purpose of defending the sovereignty and territorial integrity of a member State of the Community. For Angola, which had acceded to the four 1949 Geneva Conventions and the 1977 Protocol and had proposed the implementation of the second protocol of 1977, peace and respect for human rights were priorities of its domestic and foreign policy.

56. Her delegation found it regrettable that the report of the Special Rapporteur mentioned only article 3 of the four 1949 Geneva Conventions, given that the conflict could very well expand and engulf the whole region. It also found it deplorable that the Special Rapporteur referred to ethnic cleansing in paragraphs 28 and 91 of his report without producing conclusive evidence. Angola categorically denied the allegations made in paragraph 29 of the report concerning shelling of the civilian population in Kimbaseke, Masina, Ndjili and Mikonga (Kinshasa), since the Angolan armed forces were complying with the laws and morals of war and were enforcing the international instruments on humanitarian law.

Organization of work

57. **The Chairman** said that, in a letter sent to the Chairman of the Third Committee (A/C.3/53/10), the Chairman of the Fifth Committee had requested the views of the members of the Third Committee on the proposed revisions to the medium-term plan for the period 1998–2001, relating to programmes 13 (International drug control), 20 (Humanitarian assistance) and 28 (Economic and social affairs). The bureau suggested that any delegation wishing to put forward views or observations on the revisions should submit them in writing, before 6 p.m. on Friday, 11 November, to the secretary of the Third Committee, who would transmit them to the Fifth Committee.

58. *It was so decided.*

The meeting rose at 12.25 p.m.